

The Share of the Library in Religious Education

ZELLA ALLEN DIXSON, A. M., L. H. D.

Librarian, The University of Chicago

THE SHARE OF THE LIBRARY IN RELIGIOUS EDUCATION.

ZELLA ALLEN DIXSON, A. M., L. H. D.
Librarian, The University of Chicago.

While there is evidence that religious education existed in the earliest of times, the share of the library in such work is modern history. For many hundreds of years librarians were charged only with the care of the unfortunate books that had become their prisoners, with no other duties in regard to them. Other persons had selected them, had brought them together as a library, and had controlled the conditions of their usefulness. But after the modern library movement that established the free public library systems, and placed librarianship among the professions, it also became a librarian's duty to be the public censor, the conservator of the moral atmosphere of the young people of the library's patrons.

Religious education in past centuries had been promoted through the fear of physical suffering; when the advancing civilization no longer approved of securing the acceptance of certain religious dogmas by such methods as burning the fingers to the stump by means of candles tied to the hand, or fastening red-hot stones to the arm pits, a more refined kind of persuasion came into being, in the form of mental torture, and vivid descriptions of the physical torments of the lost souls, in a pit of undying flame served its day in establishing the young lives in their proper religious environment. While it is a "far cry"—from the days when individuals were burned at the stake because they were irreligious according to the standards of those times,—to the intellectual appeal of a well equipped library, the imperative need for considering adequate means for securing for our young folks the development of mind and body in such a manner as to produce individuals of strong characters, is still the *burning* question.

Religious ignorance has always existed; it is our hardest fighting enemy today. From century to century, the special ground of religious dissensions has shifted, the methods of instruction have changed, broader education in other fields has forced religious thought out of its ruts, but still it is true today that there is no other field of research in which the baleful effects of ignorance is more apparent, than in that of religious education. Religious ideas are of all others, the most deep-seated and abiding; because the process of changing them, or, of acquiring

new thoughts concerning them, requires a process of evaluation of hereditary dogmas that many good people would consider inherently wicked.

We say "public opinion must create an atmosphere in which the best thought of our time, taken at its highest point of intelligence will be accepted by our young people." But how is public opinion formed? Not alone from the utterances of specialists, on the lecture platform, or in the pulpit, but from the printed page; not alone from the eloquence of scholars, but by the statements that come from the great mass of our common people, upon whose accurate knowledge and broad-mindedness we must rest all final appeal upon the great questions of the day. Public opinion is neither the pulpit, nor the class-room, but rather the great composite, formed by the union of the views of many obscure private individuals, representing the culture and general education of modern times taken at its normal point. When this fact was at last recognized, the library, as the only institution equipped to carry on such an important work, was given its place and share in the education of the people. In taking up this important work the library has been hampered from the very start for lack of the right kind of books, capable of doing this great work for the young people, as it should be done.

Until the middle of the sixteenth century there were absolutely no children's books, as we understand the term. Their religious education was a matter of personal instruction apart from the printed page. A few highly developed children with precocious minds read and enjoyed the books prepared for adults, but the great army of healthy, happy, normal boys and girls had no books and no part in the great and beautiful world of literature. Towards the close of the 16th century a few books for children, written in the simple language of childhood, consisting of Bible anecdotes, texts of scripture with the simplified meaning added, began slowly to find their way into the homes of the educated classes. These were followed later on by short stories of animal life, folk-tales, and books dealing in a general way with subjects of interest to children.

Such an invasion of new ideas was severely criticised; was considered an ill omen, and indicative of the moral degeneracy of the times. When these books continued to arrive, when their number and the variety of subjects treated, steadily increased, disapproval turned to bitter opposition. In his *Memoirs*, Isaac Watts, who was one of the earliest authors of books for children, tells us that his friends despised him for his labors, and consid-

ered it a poor use to make of one's energies to employ them in "writing literature for babes."

The Sunday Schools were quick to see the power for good in such an agency. Almost at once upon the creation of these books they began to collect them and to use them in connection with their schools of religious instruction. This had the effect of increasing out of all proportion to other subjects the books on religious topics, and at the same time threw into the hands of individuals wholly unfitted for the task, the labor of preparing these books for publication.

Beginning with small tracts, church catechisms and lives of the saints, the list gradually increased to include simple little newspapers and periodicals, story papers, Sunday School helps, and leaflets of all sorts. From that period on to the present day it has become increasingly the custom for each religious denomination to have accessible to its members an extensive literature to teach its own views of religious truth. A large proportion of this cannot be used in public libraries because of its partisan nature and because much of it is wholly without literary value, and gives wrong and distorted views of life. The Sunday-school story book, with its "goody, goody" atmosphere, in which is depicted the exploits of the child of precocious goodness, forms a striking contrast to the stories that fill the shelves of the modern library. For today the library books are in the hands of people of another mind. We appreciate that thousands of men and women are openly irreligious, and some have made sad shipwreck of their lives, because as boys and girls they failed to get just the right start in the race of life. We are living in a time when the opportunities of youth are understood as never before. Special, communal, and college and university settlements have demonstrated the force of environment and the active power of evil thoughts in the development of character. So in the libraries we do our very best for the young people; they have the books in the prettiest binding, with the most attractive pictures and printed in the clearest type; the highest priced artists and authors work to make their books and all because the library has come into its own, can control the books prepared for its use, and has joined forces with the pulpit and the lecture hall to save the characters of the rising generation.

And how does the library perform its part? First, by insisting that every subject be presented from its two sides, thus teaching its readers to think out each personally, the matter at hand; and, second, by creating an atmosphere of unprejudiced opinion

in which it is possible to hunt down any subject, thinking clearly, logically, sanely. And having thus established the mind in its own self-respect, the library endeavors to associate it with the great thinkers of all time, providing that companionship in the life-experiences of others that will interpret life's lessons to the humblest seeker after truth.

While all young people during the years of student life come more or less to acquire the library habit, and to come under its influence, the library makes its strongest appeal, as an educator, to those who have completed the school day period. It is now clearly recognized that education is not the process of accumulating information, but rather a system of mental gymnastics, by which an individual is trained to think and aided to gain control over mental powers.

Students go from the kindergarten to the primary: from the secondary grades to the high school, and then perhaps to the college or the university, and then at last, out of school-life into life's school, there to enter upon the long course of self-culture through the quiet hours of study in some well-equipped library.

We hear constantly of the value, on the threshold of life, of a correct environment, of good companions, of the wonderful psychic power of healthy, happy thoughts to make or mar the life. Where could we take our young people, that they might better secure these things? Let us consider for a moment what is really represented by the library to which we bring them, with all their latent powers trained and the library habit formed? Here we introduce them to a community of the wisest and wittiest men and women, picked out of all civilized countries in 2,000 years; a little circle of personal friends; the tenderest and bravest men and women, who have had to meet life much as they must meet it, and whose experiences have made all life plainer and easier for all those who come after them. Here they all are to know and to love! Moreover, they meet us at their best, with their life's history, including valuable research material arranged in order to give us the full benefit of their individual experience with life's problems. In their day and generation these persons were hidden away in their libraries. They were inaccessible even to those who were their own contemporaries; often they were most impatient of interruption, and were hedged about by social restrictions and class etiquette, yet these young people of ours may meet them as intimate friends of their own.

In the class-room, in the church, young people receive impressions from one or two individuals; in the library their minds

are acted upon by thousands of individuals, representing every shade and variety of thought on those subjects in which they are most interested. Thus the share of the library in the religious education of modern life, is to exert to its fullest extent the final influence upon trained and disciplined minds.

There is always much disagreement even between librarians themselves as to what books should be excluded from the shelves of a public library; in general, however, we agree that bad books have just as powerful an influence as good ones and must be kept from those over whom they will exert an evil influence. But it must be recognized that what is harmful to one class of readers, is not so to another. A thoroughly bad book is, briefly, one that makes evil attractive, that misstates facts, and that gives unreal and untrue pictures of life. Many books are injurious to immature minds, but are laboratory material for others whose minds are mature and whose characters are formed.

Some would include among bad books, those that are irreligious in thought or expression; but on all such disputed matter it is far better to preserve an unprejudiced attitude and furnish the best books strongly partisan to each side. An evident desire to force a decision in favor of one side or the other, often creates a reaction that drives a reader in the opposite direction; one should remember that nothing is really ours until by thinking we have made it so and be willing to let others work out their salvation in the same way, for only thus can any one give an honest reason for the faith that is in him.

It is the distinctive share of the modern library to furnish the facilities for such work, and therefore, it is really the library that must make the final contribution to religious education, and for that reason it is everywhere recognized as one of the most powerful of all the forces by which this old world is pushed forward.

the world is a vast and beautiful one, and it is our duty to explore it and to enjoy it. We should not be content with the narrow confines of our own little world, but we should seek to know the world as it is, and to love it as it is. We should not be afraid of the unknown, but we should be brave and curious, and we should seek to discover the secrets of the universe. We should not be satisfied with the present, but we should strive for the future, and we should work to make the world a better place for all of us. We should not be selfish, but we should be generous and kind, and we should seek to help others in need. We should not be lazy, but we should be diligent and hardworking, and we should seek to achieve our goals and dreams. We should not be afraid of failure, but we should be brave and persistent, and we should seek to overcome our challenges and to reach our potential. We should not be afraid of death, but we should be brave and courageous, and we should seek to live our lives to the fullest. We should not be afraid of the future, but we should be brave and optimistic, and we should seek to create a better world for ourselves and for all of us. We should not be afraid of the unknown, but we should be brave and curious, and we should seek to discover the secrets of the universe. We should not be satisfied with the present, but we should strive for the future, and we should work to make the world a better place for all of us. We should not be selfish, but we should be generous and kind, and we should seek to help others in need. We should not be lazy, but we should be diligent and hardworking, and we should seek to achieve our goals and dreams. We should not be afraid of failure, but we should be brave and persistent, and we should seek to overcome our challenges and to reach our potential. We should not be afraid of death, but we should be brave and courageous, and we should seek to live our lives to the fullest. We should not be afraid of the future, but we should be brave and optimistic, and we should seek to create a better world for ourselves and for all of us.

Feb. 1910.

The Share of the Library in Religious Education

ZELLA ALLEN DIXSON, A. M., L. H. D.

Librarian, The University of Chicago

Reprint from RELIGIOUS EDUCATION, February, 1910

THE SHARE OF THE LIBRARY IN RELIGIOUS EDUCATION.

ZELLA ALLEN DIXSON, A. M., L. H. D.
Librarian, The University of Chicago.

While there is evidence that religious education existed in the earliest of times, the share of the library in such work is modern history. For many hundreds of years librarians were charged only with the care of the unfortunate books that had become their prisoners, with no other duties in regard to them. Other persons had selected them, had brought them together as a library, and had controlled the conditions of their usefulness. But after the modern library movement that established the free public library systems, and placed librarianship among the professions, it also became a librarian's duty to be the public censor, the conservator of the moral atmosphere of the young people of the library's patrons.

Religious education in past centuries had been promoted through the fear of physical suffering; when the advancing civilization no longer approved of securing the acceptance of certain religious dogmas by such methods as burning the fingers to the stump by means of candles tied to the hand, or fastening red-hot stones to the arm pits, a more refined kind of persuasion came into being, in the form of mental torture, and vivid descriptions of the physical torments of the lost souls, in a pit of undying flame served its day in establishing the young lives in their proper religious environment. While it is a "far cry"—from the days when individuals were burned at the stake because they were irreligious, according to the standards of those times,—to the intellectual appeal of a well equipped library, the imperative need for considering adequate means for securing for our young folks the development of mind and body in such a manner as to produce individuals of strong characters, is still the *burning* question.

Religious ignorance has always existed; it is our hardest fighting enemy today. From century to century, the special ground of religious dissensions has shifted, the methods of instruction have changed, broader education in other fields has forced religious thought out of its ruts, but still it is true today that there is no other field of research in which the baleful effects of ignorance is more apparent, than in that of religious education. Religious ideas are of all others, the most deep-seated and abiding; because the process of changing them, or, of acquiring

new thoughts concerning them, requires a process of evaluation of hereditary dogmas that many good people would consider inherently wicked.

We say "public opinion must create an atmosphere in which the best thought of our time, taken at its highest point of intelligence will be accepted by our young people." But how is public opinion formed? Not alone from the utterances of specialists, on the lecture platform, or in the pulpit, but from the printed page; not alone from the eloquence of scholars, but by the statements that come from the great mass of our common people, upon whose accurate knowledge and broad-mindedness we must rest all final appeal upon the great questions of the day. Public opinion is neither the pulpit, nor the class-room, but rather the great composite, formed by the union of the views of many obscure private individuals, representing the culture and general education of modern times taken at its normal point. When this fact was at last recognized, the library, as the only institution equipped to carry on such an important work, was given its place and share in the education of the people. In taking up this important work the library has been hampered from the very start for lack of the right kind of books, capable of doing this great work for the young people, as it should be done.

Until the middle of the sixteenth century there were absolutely no children's books, as we understand the term. Their religious education was a matter of personal instruction apart from the printed page. A few highly developed children with precocious minds read and enjoyed the books prepared for adults, but the great army of healthy, happy, normal boys and girls had no books and no part in the great and beautiful world of literature. Towards the close of the 16th century a few books for children, written in the simple language of childhood, consisting of Bible anecdotes, texts of scripture with the simplified meaning added, began slowly to find their way into the homes of the educated classes. These were followed later on by short stories of animal life, folk-tales, and books dealing in a general way with subjects of interest to children.

Such an invasion of new ideas was severely criticised; was considered an ill omen, and indicative of the moral degeneracy of the times. When these books continued to arrive, when their number and the variety of subjects treated, steadily increased, disapproval turned to bitter opposition. In his Memoirs, Isaac Watts, who was one of the earliest authors of books for children, tells us that his friends despised him for his labors, and consid-

ered it a poor use to make of one's energies to employ them in "writing literature for babes."

The Sunday Schools were quick to see the power for good in such an agency. Almost at once upon the creation of these books they began to collect them and to use them in connection with their schools of religious instruction. This had the effect of increasing out of all proportion to other subjects the books on religious topics, and at the same time threw into the hands of individuals wholly unfitted for the task, the labor of preparing these books for publication.

Beginning with small tracts, church catechisms and lives of the saints, the list gradually increased to include simple little newspapers and periodicals, story papers, Sunday School helps, and leaflets of all sorts. From that period on to the present day it has become increasingly the custom for each religious denomination to have accessible to its members an extensive literature to teach its own views of religious truth. A large proportion of this cannot be used in public libraries because of its partisan nature and because much of it is wholly without literary value, and gives wrong and distorted views of life. The Sunday-school story book, with its "goody, goody" atmosphere, in which is depicted the exploits of the child of precocious goodness, forms a striking contrast to the stories that fill the shelves of the modern library. For today the library books are in the hands of people of another mind. We appreciate that thousands of men and women are openly irreligious, and some have made sad shipwreck of their lives, because as boys and girls they failed to get just the right start in the race of life. We are living in a time when the opportunities of youth are understood as never before. Special, communal, and college and university settlements have demonstrated the force of environment and the active power of evil thoughts in the development of character. So in the libraries we do our very best for the young people; they have the books in the prettiest binding, with the most attractive pictures and printed in the clearest type; the highest priced artists and authors work to make their books and all because the library has come into its own, can control the books prepared for its use, and has joined forces with the pulpit and the lecture hall to save the characters of the rising generation.

And how does the library perform its part? First, by insisting that every subject be presented from its two sides, thus teaching its readers to think out each personally, the matter at hand; and, second, by creating an atmosphere of unprejudiced opinion

in which it is possible to hunt down any subject, thinking clearly, logically, sanely. And having thus established the mind in its own self-respect, the library endeavors to associate it with the great thinkers of all time, providing that companionship in the life-experiences of others that will interpret life's lessons to the humblest seeker after truth.

While all young people during the years of student life come more or less to acquire the library habit, and to come under its influence, the library makes its strongest appeal, as an educator, to those who have completed the school day period. It is now clearly recognized that education is not the process of accumulating information, but rather a system of mental gymnastics, by which an individual is trained to think and aided to gain control over mental powers.

Students go from the kindergarten to the primary: from the secondary grades to the high school, and then perhaps to the college or the university, and then at last, out of school-life into life's school, there to enter upon the long course of self-culture through the quiet hours of study in some well-equipped library.

We hear constantly of the value, on the threshold of life, of a correct environment, of good companions, of the wonderful psychic power of healthy, happy thoughts to make or mar the life. Where could we take our young people, that they might better secure these things? Let us consider for a moment what is really represented by the library to which we bring them, with all their latent powers trained and the library habit formed? Here we introduce them to a community of the wisest and wittiest men and women, picked out of all civilized countries in 2,000 years; a little circle of personal friends; the tenderest and bravest men and women, who have had to meet life much as they must meet it, and whose experiences have made all life plainer and easier for all those who come after them. Here they all are to know and to love! Moreover, they meet us at their best, with their life's history, including valuable research material arranged in order to give us the full benefit of their individual experience with life's problems. In their day and generation these persons were hidden away in their libraries. They were inaccessible even to those who were their own contemporaries; often they were most impatient of interruption, and were hedged about by social restrictions and class etiquette, yet these young people of ours may meet them as intimate friends of their own.

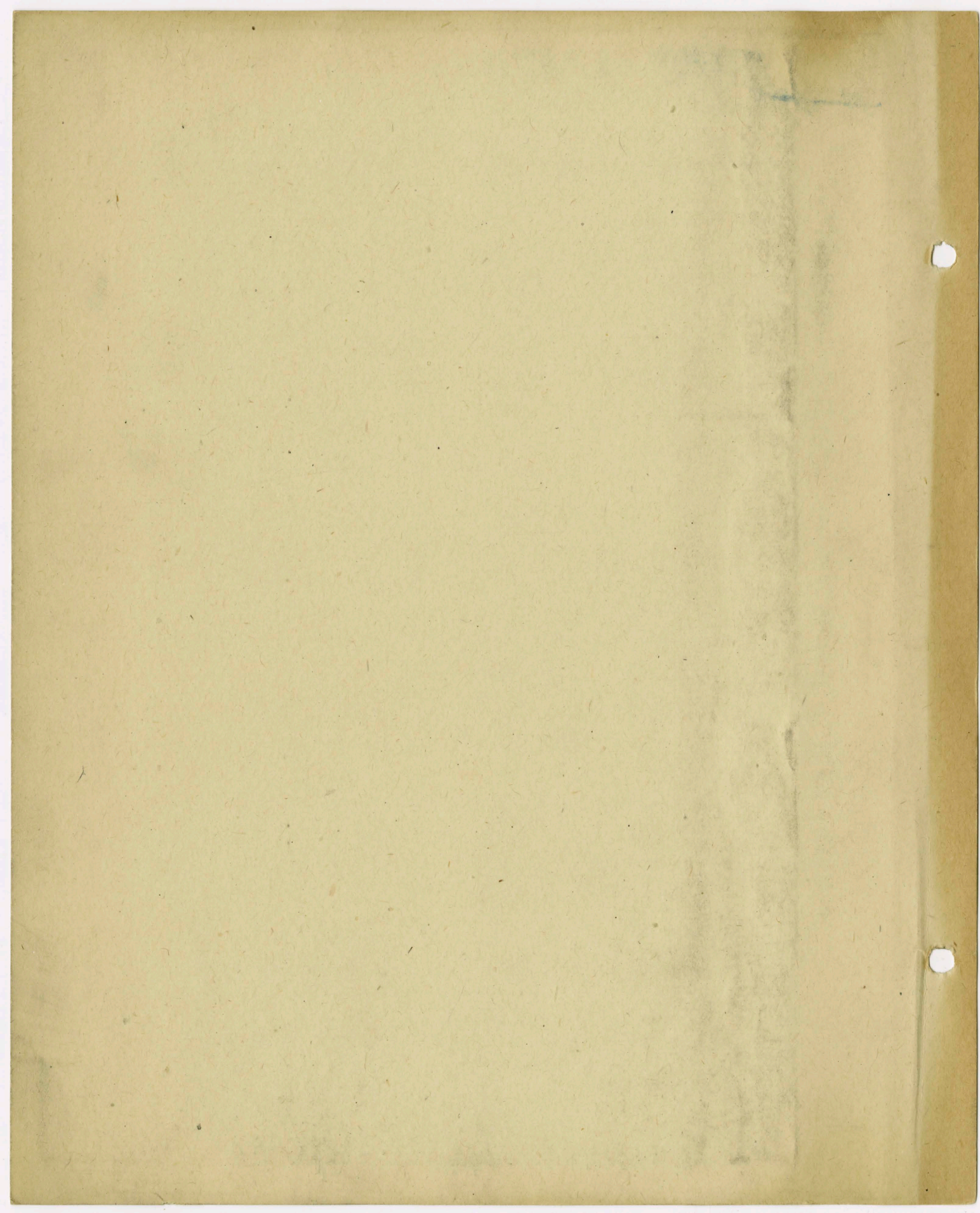
In the class-room, in the church, young people receive impressions from one or two individuals; in the library their minds

are acted upon by thousands of individuals, representing every shade and variety of thought on those subjects in which they are most interested. Thus the share of the library in the religious education of modern life, is to exert to its fullest extent the final influence upon trained and disciplined minds.

There is always much disagreement even between librarians themselves as to what books should be excluded from the shelves of a public library; in general, however, we agree that bad books have just as powerful an influence as good ones and must be kept from those over whom they will exert an evil influence. But it must be recognized that what is harmful to one class of readers, is not so to another. A thoroughly bad book is, briefly, one that makes evil attractive, that misstates facts, and that gives unreal and untrue pictures of life. Many books are injurious to immature minds, but are laboratory material for others whose minds are mature and whose characters are formed.

Some would include among bad books, those that are irreligious in thought or expression; but on all such disputed matter it is far better to preserve an unprejudiced attitude and furnish the best books strongly partisan to each side. An evident desire to force a decision in favor of one side or the other, often creates a reaction that drives a reader in the opposite direction; one should remember that nothing is really ours until by thinking we have made it so and be willing to let others work out their salvation in the same way, for only thus can any one give an honest reason for the faith that is in him.

It is the distinctive share of the modern library to furnish the facilities for such work, and therefore, it is really the library that must make the final contribution to religious education, and for that reason it is everywhere recognized as one of the most powerful of all the forces by which this old world is pushed forward.



Twenty-five Years of Library Service

March 1, Mrs Zella Allen Dixon presented her resignation to the trustees of the University of Chicago and asked to be relieved July 1, 1910, of the work of the administrative head of the university library, a position she has held since a year previous to the opening of the university.

Mrs Dixon began her library service in 1885 at Columbia college just at the time that Melvil Dewey was preparing for the opening of the first library science school for the training of librarians. While still on the library staff of Columbia she was sent to assist in the organization of a library in the West, which engagement connected with others near-by, so that she never returned to New York but became a library expert, going from one library to another until 1888, when she accepted the position of librarian of Denison university, at Granville, O.

In this period of expert work she organized or rearranged 22 libraries, among them Elyria public, the La Crosse public, the Kenyon college, the Mt Vernon public, the Denison university, the Baptist theological seminary library.

From Denison university Mrs Dixon became librarian of the Baptist divinity school at Morgan Park, Ill., the first of the great collections to be arranged for the new University of Chicago. While she was filling this position the Divinity school was made a department of the University of Chicago and Dr Harper secured her services to organize the university library and be its administrative officer.

Of the original staff then selected for this initial work of the library of the university, only Mrs Dixon remains on the staff of the library today.

Mrs Dixon has moved the library five times and feels that in its sixth and final removal someone else should have the burden. The library which began with 40,000 divinity books now has a splendid collection of highly spe-

cialized works numbering nearly half a million books.

Mrs Dixon will be missed on the campus of the university, where today one hears at every turn expressions of deepest regret that she has decided to lay down the heavy burden she has carried so long. The general feeling of faculty and students is fairly expressed in the following letter from Dr Ernest D Burton, the library commissioner of the university:

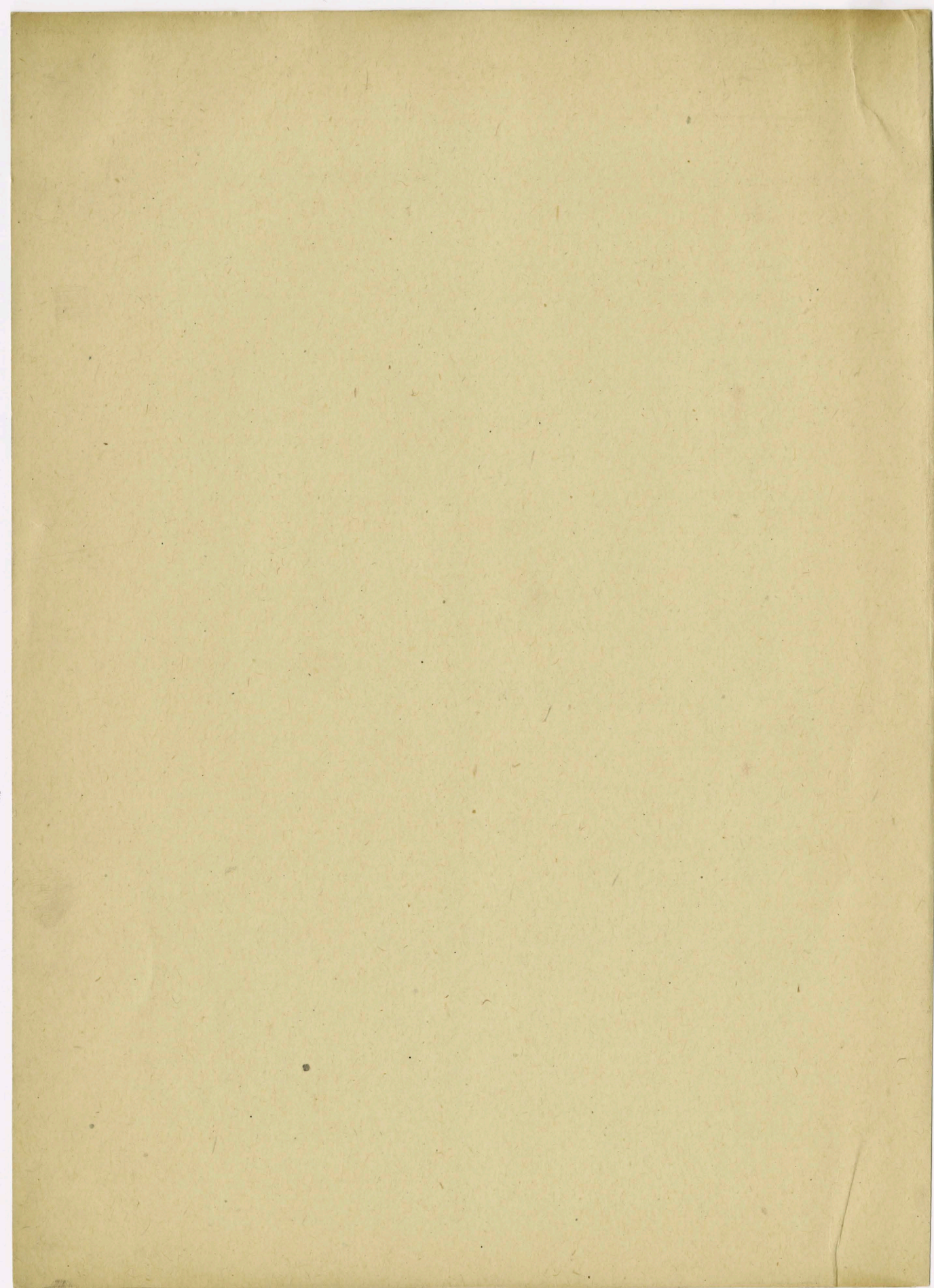
March 11, 1910.

My dear Mrs Dixon:

President Judson has informed me of your intention to terminate your connection with the University of Chicago, with the end of this present year. Will you permit me to express my sincere appreciation of the great service which you have rendered to the university in connection with the library from its very foundation to the present time. I have at least some understanding of the multiplicity and complexity of the duties which you have had to discharge, and of the difficulties with which you have had to contend. That the work of the library has gone on so smoothly, and has reached the degree of perfection in organization that has been achieved, ought to be to you a very great satisfaction. I earnestly hope, as I expect, that you will find great satisfaction in the leisure which you will now be able to enjoy, and in the congenial tasks to which you will be able to give your undivided attention, and that you will carry with you into these happier tasks the assurance that the arduous work which you have given to this university has contributed greatly to the success of its work, and has received some measure, at least, of appreciation. Sincerely yours,

ERNEST D. BURTON.

Mrs Dixon is a charter member of both the Illinois library association and the Chicago library club and has been a member of the A. L. A. since 1886. Of late years she has given much of her private time to book-making, being the founder and proprietor of an interesting craft-print shop, from which several beautiful books have come to testify to her literary ability and her skill as a craft-printer. It is to enable her to devote all her time and energy to her literary work that she retires from active library work at the close of twenty-five years of service.



MRS. DIXSON RESIGNS AS UNIVERSITY LIBRARIAN

**Retires from Active Work after Nine-
teen Years as Head of Uni-
versity Library.**

NO SUCCESSOR YET CHOSEN

**Has Had Twenty-five Years of Li-
brary Experience—Will Devote
Time to Literary Work.**

Mrs. Zella Dixon, for 19 years chief librarian of the University, has resigned her position to devote all of her time to her private literary interests, according to the announcement yesterday made public for the first time in the May issue of Public Libraries. Her resignation is to take effect July 1, and as yet no selection of a successor has been made, although Secretary Robertson stated that many applications had been received.

Mrs. Dixon has been head of the University's library since the year prior to the opening of the University, and in that time she has moved the library five times. She stated yesterday that the sixth removal, which will be into the new Harper Memorial building, should be made by some one else. The library from which she retires as head began with about 40,000 volumes, and now has a collection of highly specialized works numbering half a million volumes.

Twenty-five Years of Work.

Mrs. Dixon began her library service in 1885 at Columbia college just at the time that Melvil Dewey was preparing for the opening of the first library science school for the training of librarians. While still on the library staff of Columbia she was sent to assist in the organization of a library in the west, which engagement connected with others near by, so that she never returned to New York, but became a library expert, going from one library to another until 1888, when she accepted the position of librarian of Denison university at Granville, O.

In this period of expert work she organized or rearranged 22 libraries, among them Elyria public, the La-Crosse public, the Mt. Vernon public, the Denison university and the Baptist Theological seminary library.

Librarian at Baptist School.

From Denison university Mrs. Dixon became librarian of the Baptist Divinity school at Morgan Park, Ill., the first of the great collections to be arranged for the new University of Chicago. While she was filling this position the Divinity school was made a department of the University of Chicago, and Dr. Harper secured her services to organize the University library and be its administrative officer.

Of the original staff then selected for this initial work of the library of the University only Mrs. Dixon remains on the staff of the library today.

*Z. A. Dixon Papers
Unprocessed
stor. 3
Box 1*

